

# Literature Circles

## Description

Literature Circles are an excellent way to foster independent reading and responding within a collaborative group environment and an opportunity for students to go beyond their Response Journals. Students in Literature Circles not only collaborate to discover meaning; they develop responsibility and also have the pleasure of reading a good book and discussing it.

A Literature Circle is a temporary group formed to read and discuss books. The circle meets regularly, and each student takes on a specific role in the discussion. These discussions, based on students' own responses, involve a minimum of teacher intervention. Although Literature Circles have a structure and specified roles, they can be modified to accommodate a variety of circumstances and needs.

## Steps

1. To introduce Literature Circles, tell students a little about the kinds of reading groups many adults belong to—the group chooses a book, and all the members read and discuss it.
2. To set up your Literature Circles, assign or allow students to choose appropriate titles from the Prentice Hall/Penguin Literature Library. Set up groups of four or five students to read and discuss one book. Interest students in the books by displaying the books in class and telling a little about each one. Allow students to examine the books, by looking at the front and back covers and flipping through the pages.
3. The roles of the participants in Literature Circles are important to the success of this strategy. You may assign roles for the duration of a Literature Circle, or you may have students rotate roles with each meeting. Four roles are essential, but other roles may be accommodated as well. The following roles are essential:  
**Discussion Director:** Creates open-ended questions to guide group discussion.  
**Literary Luminary:** Selects quotations or details from the text to bring to the attention of the group.  
**Connector:** Points out ways that the reading connects to themselves, the group, or the world.  
**Illustrator:** Represents key scenes or ideas from the reading in some kind of drawing.

Literature Circles may also have participants in the following roles:

**Summarizer:** Prepares a summary of the key points of each reading segment.

**Vocabulary Enricher:** Clarifies meanings of important or unfamiliar words.

It is important that students become familiar with the roles before they take them on. To help students organize and structure their responses, give each group three or four copies of Roles in Literature Circles. Students may use these sheets as guides and reminders for their roles and to make notes in preparation for the discussion. (They will probably need additional paper to record their ideas for their group discussions.) You might model and practice the roles with a selection the whole class reads together.

## General Resources

Some students may find the defined roles too limiting. Remind them that they are not required to focus only on these roles. Encourage them to think of other roles that group participants might play—for example, someone to get information on various places mentioned in a book.

4. Choose a reasonable time frame for students to finish reading their books. Students then meet once or twice a week, during class, to discuss the book in their Literature Circles. For example, you might allow three weeks for an average-length novel. For the first assignment, have students set up a reading schedule. They must determine the number of pages, with logical starting and stopping points, to read in preparation for each meeting.
5. As students read, encourage them to take notes or use sticky notes to mark passages that contain memorable ideas. They can also make notes using a Two-Column Response Journal.
6. When students meet in their groups, they should run their own discussions. (In the beginning, you will probably need to prompt them with questions or comments if their ideas flounder.) Tell them to refer to *all* the notes they have prepared when they talk about their books, not just the Roles in Literature Circles sheet.
7. When a group has finished a book, you might ask the members to tell the class about it. Encourage them to tell just enough to get other students interested in reading it. When all groups are finished reading, have students make new book choices and form new groups.

## Source

Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*, 2nd ed. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.